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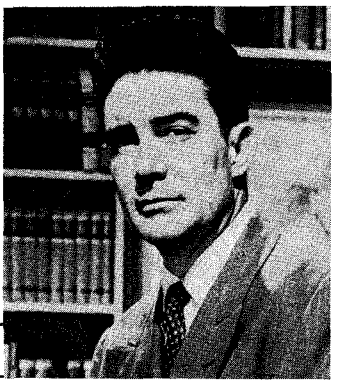

DAN SMOOT

THE BLACKOUT AND THE POWER GRID

For many years, electric power companies throughout the United States produced and distributed their own power. Hence, power failures were limited to local systems. Prodded and coaxed by the federal government, power companies, in recent years, began forming a vast power grid—interconnecting their transmission lines so that power could be transported from one system to another in times of emergency or heavy demand.

Today, according to a Federal Power Commission survey, 97 percent of the electric industry's generating capacity is integrated in five large networks. The largest of these (with 167 million kilowatts of generating capacity) covers, roughly, all the United States east of Texas and of the Rocky Mountains. Within this great eastern intertie is a smaller grid called CANUSE (Canada-United States eastern interconnection), covering an 80,000 square mile area, from Ontario, Canada, to Southern Pennsylvania, where 30,000,000 people live.[1]

In 1964, the Federal Power Commission released a report, saying it was unlikely that all electric power could be cut off in any area of the nation, even under nuclear attack. The FPC attributed the invulnerability of the nation's power systems to the grid which ties systems together, enabling any area which suddenly needs power (because of breakdown or excessive demand) to get power automatically from other areas. The purpose of the 1964 FPC report was to urge expansion of the power grid system to achieve total, nationwide interconnection and interdependence of all major power producing facilities.[2]

But — on Tuesday, November 9, 1965, when it was 5:15 p.m. in Ontario, and along the eastern seaboard of the United States, a mysterious surge of electric power broke an automatic switching device in a Canadian power plant near Niagara Falls. This triggered a chain reaction which cut off electric power in the heavily industrialized, densely populated, 80,000-square-mile

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area served by CANUSE. New York City was blacked out for 12 hours. About 800,000 people were trapped in subways; thousands were caught in elevators; millions were stranded without transportation; virtually all industry abruptly stopped.[3]

The system had backfired: instead of supplying power to an area where there had been a failure, the interlocking grid spread the failure throughout a great region, affecting 30 million people.[3]

George A. Orrok, vice president in charge of engineering for Boston Edison Company, said that if the heavy grid system, which the Federal Power Commission wants, had been operating nationwide, the entire nation would have been plunged into darkness in less than a second.[4]

John P. Jolliffe, chief of power operations for Bonneville Power Administration in the Pacific Northwest, said the giant northwest power pool broke down on June 6, 1950, just as the eastern power grid did on November 9, 1965; but power was restored in the Northwest within an hour. He acknowledged that another such breakdown could occur but claimed that a prolonged blackout, as occurred in the East, is improbable in the Northwest, where concentrated use is much lower.[5]

Jolliffe said the big breakdowns occur because an automatic device fails to shut off a system when there is a line failure. He said that systems could be built with virtually no chance of widespread failure, but that the cost would be prohibitive.[5]

One great danger revealed by the blackout is the danger of more federal controls which will make the electric power situation infinitely worse. It is obvious that the power grid system was responsible for spreading a local failure into a regional disaster. It is also obvious that if the entire nation had been tightly linked in the kind of single power grid the federal government wants, the blackout would have been nationwide. Yet, federal officials and other advocates of centralized, federally-controlled power are trying to exploit the eastern power failure as an excuse for hurrying to completion the kind of national power grid which could have caused national disaster on November 9.

At Indianapolis on November 10, 1965, Dr. Ahmed H. El-Abiad, a Purdue University authority on power systems, said "Electric utilities neither understand well enough nor control well enough the great regional power networks which now cover the United States." Instead of recommending that electric utilities limit their interties to systems which they can understand and control, Dr. El-Abiad suggested, among other things, that the networks have *central* authorities who can make decisions for the entire system, overriding decisions by local officials of local systems.[6]

On November 11, 1965, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall said a consensus of government and private experts is that "stronger interties between systems" would have made the November 9 blackout less severe, and might even have averted it.[4] Joseph C. Swidler, Chairman of the Federal Power Commission, also favors a national power grid. These officials imply that if a nationwide grid had been operating, power might have rushed from the Tennessee Valley or from the West Coast to meet the emergency in the Northeast. They ignore the probability that the reverse would have happened: the power grid would have spread the eastern blackout throughout the nation.

The federal government entered the field of producing electric power in 1906, when it began building small generating plants to provide electric power for government installations only. The government's electric power program was limited to this scope until 1925, when a federal power plant was built at Wilson Dam, Alabama, on the Muscle Shoals stretch of the Tennessee River. By 1928, the government was beginning to sell some electric power for general use, but in very small amounts.[7]

The 1928 authorization of the Boulder Canyon project (Hoover Dam) drastically changed the situation. Hoover Dam now produces more than 1,000,000 kilowatts of power for general sale, in competition with private investor-owned production facilities. During the New Deal era, govern-

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ment power dams multiplied rapidly: Grand Coulee, Bonneville, Shasta, Parker, Davis, TVA, and others came into existence.[7]

In 1930, government-owned facilities produced only 5 percent of all electric power in the United States. In 1963, government facilities produced 25 percent of all electric power.[7]

The federal government is responsible for the frightfully vulnerable electric power system we now have. The more the federal government intervenes and controls, the more dangerous the situation becomes.

The mammoth federally-financed, publicly-operated power plant at Niagara Falls provides a case in point. For many years, advocates of socialized (government owned) electric power wanted a government generating plant at the Falls. A private power plant owned by the Niagara Mohawk Power Company was already in operation there.[7]

On May 3, 1950, Herbert H. Lehman (Democrat, then U. S. Senator from New York) and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. (Democrat, then U. S. Representative from New York) introduced legislation to authorize a federal power plant at Niagara.[7]

On August 9, 1950, the Senate ratified the Niagara Treaty with Canada. The Treaty provided that the United States and Canada could build separate power facilities on the Falls, and share the water flow equally.[7]

Controversy raged for the next six years. Both Thomas E. Dewey (when Republican Governor of New York) and W. Averell Harriman (when Democrat Governor of New York) supported the public power lobby, while the Niagara Mohawk Power Company and other investor-owned utilities opposed a public power plant at Niagara. On June 7, 1956, a rock slide destroyed Niagara Mohawk's plant at the Falls; and the company switched sides in the controversy, becoming an advocate of a public power plant.[7]

A "compromise" bill was passed by Congress and signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1957. The "compromise" was, in fact, a shameful deception. To placate those who opposed construction of another big federally-owned, federally-operated power project the bill provided that the power plant at Niagara would be built and operated, not by the federal government, but by the New York Power Authority — with the federal government providing assistance and, of course, controlling the power plant.[7]

Work on the Niagara public power plant began in 1957. The first electric power from the facility went into transmission lines in 1961. Its output is the second largest in the United States. It sells power to the Niagara Mohawk Power Company and to other utilities (both public and private).[7]

The giant Niagara public power plant has prevented construction and expansion of smaller generating plants in the region, making a vast industrial area dependent on a single source of supply and on miles of vulnerable transmission lines.

Enthusiasts for big water-powered plants capable of generating power for whole regions claim this system is more economical than a system of numerous, relatively small steam-generating plants, each serving a limited area. There is, however, impressive evidence to the contrary. Private, investor-owned power facilities *must* operate economically or go out of business. As long as they were left free to produce power for the nation, without government interference, they utilized the system of numerous, local steam-generating plants —thus proving that this is the most economical system. It was only after the government began pouring taxpayers' money into power production, ignoring economy and efficiency, that we began building fabulously expensive hydroelectric plants to produce power which must be transported over thousands of miles of fabulously expensive transmission lines.

After the November 9, 1965, eastern blackout, there can be no valid argument about which system provides the nation maximum security. The present system of gigantic government-owned, or government-subsidized, or government-controlled generating plants, all tied together in a govern-

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ment-sponsored power grid which makes them all interdependent, leaves the nation at the mercy of some faulty switch, some careless workman, some skilled saboteur. A nationwide system of small, investor-owned generating plants, each serving a limited area, could not be knocked out by one blow.

Public demand for electric power does fluctuate from hour to hour, and from day to day; and generating plants do break down. Hence, it is sensible for power companies to develop grids—interconnecting transmission lines which enable one system to borrow from another in times of peak demand or of emergency. Private power companies actually began developing such grids in the 1930's; but the grids developed slowly and sensibly, in response to actual need, under the controls of profit-and-loss economics, and within the limits of the technological skills and facilities of private companies responsible for them.

The power grid became a dangerous monster after the federal government intervened, persuading, prodding, or forcing private companies to form grids which they could neither understand nor control.

During the administrations of President John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, the federal government has stampeded many private power companies into the power grid system, by trying to establish a *federal* power grid, owned and operated by the federal government, excluding private enterprise from the field. This aspect of the federal government's illegal operations in the electric power industry was discussed in the August 12, 1963, issue of this *Report*, entitled "The Power Grid Scheme." Portions of that *Report* bear repeating at this time:

The 1960 platform of the Democrat Party advocated the "development of efficient regional giant power systems from all sources, including water, tidal, and nuclear power, to supply low-cost electricity to all retail electric systems, public, private, and co-operative."

To implement the promise of his party's platform, President Kennedy [in 1961] appointed Stewart L. Udall as Secretary of the Interior. In 1962, Udall made a tour of the Soviet Union to study communist electric power installations. Upon his arrival in Moscow, Secretary Udall said:

"We are here to learn as much as we can. We have so much to learn from your Soviet specialists in this field."

Udall's plans to place the power industry under tight control, and eventual ownership, of the federal government, include expansion of TVA facilities, expansion of Rural Electrification Administration activities in financing co-operative power producing plants, the building of new multi-purpose dams in all parts of the nation, and a nation-wide power grid, owned and controlled by the federal government.

The power grid, when completed, will involve long-distance, high-voltage transmission lines connecting all power-producing facilities in the continental United States, so that electric power, produced in any region, can be delivered to any other region, over facilities owned by the federal government. Privately owned, long-distance transmission lines will be forced out of business by federal monopoly, or harassed out of business by federal regulations and controls . . . .

First, the Pacific Northwest will be linked with Southern California in a West Coast system. This system will then be tied in with the Parker-Davis-Hoover Dam system in southern Nevada; with the Rio Grande project in New Mexico; with the Upper Colorado River Storage Project complex of power dams now being constructed in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico; with the Missouri River Basin system which spreads through several states in the upper midwest; and with the Southwestern Power Administration system in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

No one seriously doubts that when the great western intertie systems are completed, the grid will be extended to the Tennessee Valley and to the Southeastern Power Administration facilities. The final stage will probably be transmission lines running up the East Coast from Florida to the northern tip of Maine . . . .

Within three months after inauguration in 1961, President Kennedy appointed a five-man task force to study and report on the feasibility of installing 1000 miles of high-voltage lines to carry power from the Bonneville Dam in Oregon to Southern California. The task force reported on December 19, 1961, proposing three alternate plans for this West Coast system—which would range in estimated cost from 136 million to 342 million dollars.

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Selecting the West Coast system to be the first stage in the nation-wide power grid system was, among other things, an effort to hide the dismal failures of Bonneville Power Administration — the great socialized power project of the Pacific Northwest.

Despite the fact that taxpayers in all parts of the nation have poured millions of dollars into the Bonneville scheme to subsidize electric power at below-cost for Bonneville customers, Bonneville could not adequately supply the region with power. Private enterprise (though taxed to help subsidize Bonneville) came in to supply the power deficiency. Now, Bonneville (during peaks of production) has a surplus of power that it cannot sell, even at below-cost rates which were fixed during the depression years.

The 1000 miles of high-voltage lines for carrying Bonneville power to Southern California will not only be a first step toward the nation-wide power grid, but will also enable Bonneville to sell its surplus power in the big California market. Bonneville also wants transmission lines to invade the Idaho market.

The Kennedy task force which, on December 19, 1961, formally recommended the Bonneville-to-Los Angeles transmission lines, urged speed, but said the lines should not be built until Congress had first enacted legislation to guarantee each region priority to its own power.

This is an interesting development in the drive to socialize the power industry in the United States. Early in the drive, the bureaucrats requested and Congress authorized (in the Flood Control Act of 1944) a policy of giving publicly-owned power facilities and non-profit, tax-favored, power organizations (REA financed co-operatives) preference as customers for below-cost federal power. If there was not enough power to go around, tax-paying consumers could go without or get their power somewhere else: the non-tax-paying co-operatives and municipally-owned facilities got first choice at buying the federal power.

Federal power bureaucrats have treated this preference policy like something sacred. Now, they find themselves trapped by it. If they build transmission lines from Bonneville to other regions, preference customers in those other regions (especially, big co-operatives and publicly-owned utilities in California) can take most of Bonneville's below-cost power. This will create a problem for politicians in the Pacific Northwest who have kept themselves in office by supporting tax-subsidized power for voters in that region.

So, the nation-wide power grid scheme is stalled until politicians of the Pacific Northwest are appeased by legislation to guarantee that all users in their region be treated as preference customers for the socialized power before any of it can be sold elsewhere.

The Kennedy administration tried unsuccessfully, in 1962 and 1963, to get congressional authorization for a federal Northwest power grid, with the desired "preference policy" included. President Johnson pushed the legislation through Congress in 1964. The bill (S 1007), passed in 1964, authorized a federal Northwest power grid.[8]

During the years 1961-1965, the federal power bureaucrats were working both sides of the street in the matter of forming a national power grid. While threatening to form a government power grid for the nation, they used their own threats as a spur to speed private companies into forming a national grid which the government could control.

It is heartening to note, however, that some investor-owned companies have resisted government pressures with regard to the power grid, despite the FPC's enormous power over them.

On July 12, 1963, J. K. Horton, President of the Southern California Edison Company, testified before the Senate Appropriations Sub-Committee, in opposition to the proposed federal Northwest-California intertie. Statements by government and private experts (expressing dismay that the November 9 blackout could happen) lend special interest to one paragraph of Mr. Horton's testimony in 1963. Mr. Horton said:

"As prudent managers of a utility, we cannot rely upon a single direct current line 800 miles in length which has claimed capacity of 1,350,000 KW. Indeed, if the proposed federal direct current line were to be operated at 1,350,000 KW, engineering studies indicated the California systems, if interconnected to the direct current line, would be taking unjustified risk of a blackout to their entire systems in the event of an outage on the direct current line. We do not intend to put our systems in such jeopardy."[9]

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Despite the great danger to national security, federal bureaucrats want to create a national power grid, by one means or another: either by building the grid as a federally-owned-and-operated system, or by forcing existing power-producing firms to form a grid which the bureaucrats can control, or by a combination of means.

Why? Note these comments from Richard Wilson's syndicated column, entitled "More Controls: Regulators Exploiting Blackout":

"The federal regulators have one paramount thought in mind: A national power grid system would unquestionably make it easier to control the economics and technology of electrical power production and distribution.

"We are seeing now in Washington a steady expansion of the scope of federal control over utilities and communications . . . .

"In the case of electric power, it is contended in a federal power survey that annual power costs could be reduced by 11 billion dollars . . . by 1980, through higher centralization . . . . One large factor in bringing about the reduction would be the advocated national power grid, which carries with it so many implications of centralized control . . . .

"FPC Chairman [Joseph C. Swidler] . . . . says that this network could be created without disturbing the present institutional arrangement and pluralistic ownership of the nation's power system. Perhaps, but the slow and steady expansion of federal control and regulation in this and other fields suggests that the contrary might be true.

"Furthermore, how can Swidler now guarantee that a mysterious power surge or fade-out in some wild and remote area would not bring the nation to a standstill?"[10]

What To Do

Government officials, while admitting they do not know what caused the electrical disturbance which triggered the November 9 blackout, have asserted that it was not caused by sabotage. Joseph C. Swidler, Chairman of the Federal Power Commission, said the vast power failure could have been caused accidentally when "someone pulled the wrong switch."[11] Could not that "someone" have been a saboteur who pulled the switch on purpose?

The gigantic, complex power grid could have collapsed because of some minor flaw or human error, as government experts clearly imply; but it could have been sabotaged by someone under communist orders. For many years, communists have been placing undercover agents in critical positions in key industries and labor unions.[12] Hidden somewhere in some inconspicuous job could be a communist agent who sabotaged the CANUSE power grid on November 9 to serve a two-fold communist purpose: (1) to test the effectiveness of communist sabotage plans; and (2) to create a national mood which will let the government move faster and further toward a tight nationwide power grid which would enable a saboteur to blackout and paralyze the whole nation when the critical time arrives.

Note one significant paragraph from a front-page article, entitled "People Aroused Against Power Monopolies," published in the November 14, 1965, issue of *The Worker* (official newspaper of the U. S. communist party):

"While nationalization of utilities . . . is not yet an immediate possibility, the big blackout has stimulated proposals for a national power grid. This would be a step towards real national coordination and control of the power network to make possible real insurance of alternative power for any area in time of an emergency. This would be at least a limited curb on the authority of the profit-hungry power companies and an assurance that additional power facilities would be built where needed."

Since it is a policy of the Johnson administration to give the public only such information as the administration wants the public to have, we can be reasonably sure we will never be told that sabotage caused the blackout, even if government investigators have reason to believe that it did. The people have no means or authority to investigate the matter, or to uncover and remove hidden communists who may be in positions to sabotage power facilities. But, if communists did sabotage the power grid, to stampede us further

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in the wrong direction, the people could make that communist scheme backfire.

When the business of producing and delivering electric power is returned to private industry, free of government controls and manipulation, a major security problem will be solved. Production and distribution facilities will be so decentralized, and independent of each other, that one act of sabotage—or a thousand acts—could not endanger the whole nation, or even an entire region.

Hence, the people still have an effective means of protecting themselves and the security of our nation: we can put irresistable pressure on all present members of Congress to block government efforts to extend the power grid. Next year, the people can elect to Congress enough constitutional conservatives to get the federal government out of *all* its unconstitutional activities in the electric power industry.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) "Failure Feeds on Self, Raising Some Questions," *The Dallas Morning News*, November 10, 1965, p. 11A; "Electricity Flow Pulled a Switch," *The Dallas Times Herald*, November 10, 1965, pp. 1, 22

(2) "Power System Reappraisal Seen," *The Dallas Morning News*, *Morning News*, November 16, 1965, p. 12A

(3) "12-Hour Blackout for 30 Million Disturbs Nation, Remains Mystery," *The Dallas Times Herald*, November 10, 1965, pp. 1A, 20A; "Blackout Laid To Device in Canada Plant," *The Dallas Morning News*, November 16, 1965, p. 1A

(4) "The Great Blackout," *U.S. News & World Report*, November 22, 1965, pp. 40-42

(5) "Power Grid In Northwest Failed in '50," *The Dallas Morning News*, November 11, 1965, p. 24A

(6) "Weaknesses of Regional Power Networks Cited," *The Indianapolis Star*, November 11, 1965, pp. 1, 24

(7) "Natural Resources and Power," *Congress And The Nation*, Congressional Quarterly Service, 1965, pp. 771-969

(8) *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1963 and 1964, pp. 463-5, 497-500

(9) "Statement Before The Senate Appropriations Sub-Committee On Interior Power Marketing Agencies On Proposed Pacific Northwest-California Power Intertie," by J. K. Horton, President, Southern California Edison Company, June 12, 1963, 11 pp.

(10) "More Controls; Regulators Exploiting Blackout," by Richard Wilson, *The Dallas Morning News*, November 12, 1965, p. 11A

(11) "N.Y. Trims Power: 'Looks Good' Now; Many Leave Jobs Early; School Cut," *The Dallas Morning News*, November 11, 1965, pp. 1A, 14A, 24A, 25A

(12) "Blackout Enlightens," by Victor Riesel, *Shreveport Journal*, November 13, 1965, Editorial page

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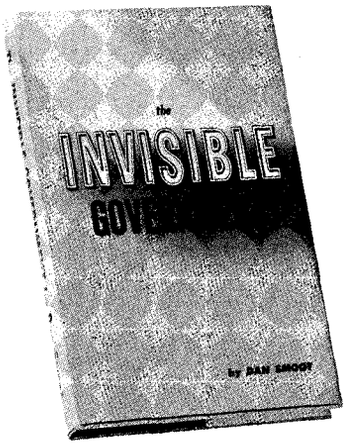

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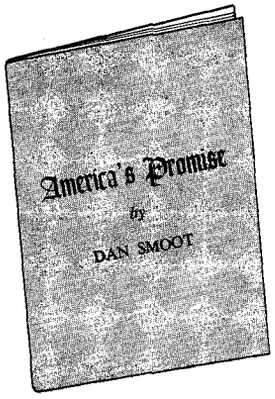

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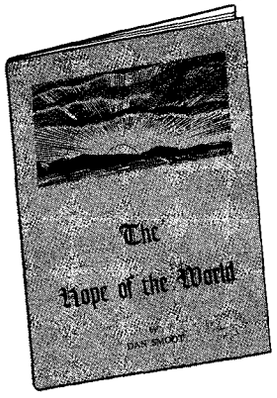

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